

PROMOTING AN EQUITABLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Small Business Resiliency Network

Commerce is partnering with 31 trusted community organizations across Washington state to provide culturally and linguistically relevant assistance to historically underserved small businesses managing the impacts of COVID-19

The needs of small business owners trying to recover from the pandemic are vast and varied. State agencies must do more to break down barriers to services and support. While many business owners have connections and resources that help them tap into government and philanthropic aid programs, enormous barriers exist that prevent many others from accessing those same programs. As a result, minority-owned and historically-underserved businesses and nonprofits are shouldering disproportionate economic impacts while having less opportunity to learn about and successfully apply for assistance.

Commerce established the Small Business Resiliency Network to ensure business owners from all communities could be informed about important resources and programs available to them. The network's trusted community organizations provide culturally- and linguistically-appropriate outreach, translation, assistance and education to ensure business owners can find the information they need from people they trust. Commerce launched the network in April 2020 with 20 partners and has expanded it to 31.

The network provides outreach, translation and technical assistance to small businesses.

"We are working around the clock coming up with innovative approaches to engage small businesses - in-person for reassurance, group chats on zoom, and wraparound services." – Lalita Uppala | Executive Director | India Asian Western Washington

"Thank you so much for helping us get through the process of getting this loan!! I am looking at my bank account today and if the loan had not gone through we would have closed down our business and we do not know if we would open again. Thank you, thank you and thank you!" – Phillip Blackburn | Owner | Dino's Pizza and Grill

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Commerce has contracted with community organizations throughout the state. Some provide services to businesses in their area, others serve businesses statewide.

The network's ongoing support is valued and needed by small businesses and by Commerce. Commerce is expanding the network in response to the significant unmet and ongoing needs of historically underserved communities. Commerce has invested \$2.7 million to fund the network through 2021. This includes helping businesses:

- Access translation assistance
- Navigate local, state, private and federal resources
- Plan for recovery and safe re-opening
- Retain and support their workforce

Importantly, the network's feedback and engagement also support Commerce's efforts to equitably administer its business support programs. For example, the network provided feedback on the small business resiliency grant program that resulted in several changes to reduce barriers to access. These include:

- Easier-to-understand applications with check boxes instead of narrative responses
- Extended timelines that allow more time for outreach and technical assistance
- Expanding business eligibility to those holding an ITIN or a tribal license if they did not have a UBI (Unified Business Identifier)
- Authorizing network providers to review and directly assist applicants with online grant application

A searchable list of partners is available at www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/technical-assistance-from-trusted-community-messengers/.

Some of the communities the network partners serve include:

- African American or Black
- Chinese
- Latino
- Vietnamese
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian Pacific
- Cambodian or Khmer
- Filipino
- Korean
- LGBTQ+
- Micro Enterprise
- Muslim or Middle Eastern/Arab
- Immigrant
- People of Color

Network partners provide services in nearly 40 languages including:

- Spanish
- Chinese
- Mandarin
- Cantonese
- Vietnamese
- Cambodian
- Arabic
- Khmer
- Tagalog
- Chamorro
- Fijian
- Marshallese
- Ilocano
- Tongan
- Iranian
- Kikuyu
- Luo
- Somali
- Swahili
- Yoruba
- Bengali
- Hindi
- Malayalm
- Punjabi